

**CITY OF NORWALK
JOINT PUBLIC HEARING – FINANCE & CLAIMS COMMITTEE
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES SEPTEMBER 24, 2025, 6:00 PM
ZOOM AND COMMON COUNCIL CHAMBERS**

ATTENDEES: Mayor Harry Rilling, Heather Dunn, James Frayer, Johan Lopez, Douglas W. Sutton, Anne Wennerstrand, Dajuan C. Wiggins Sr.

OTHERS: Barbara Smyth, Council President; Diana Carpio, Board of Education Chair; Harry Rilling, Mayor; Mr. Jared Schmitt, Chief Financial Officer of the City; Lunda Asmani; the Chief Financial Officer of Norwalk Public Schools; Sheri McCready-Pritchett, Vice Chair of the Board of Education and Finance Chair; and Dr. Alexandra Estrella, Superintendent of Norwalk Public Schools.

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Mr. Rilling at 6:00 PM. He then led the assembly in pledging allegiance to the flag of the United States of America.

II. ROLL CALL

Mr. Rilling asked attendees identified themselves and they did so as follows: Mr. Douglas W. Sutton from District D; Ms. Heather Dunn, District D Councilor; Mr. James Frayer, Chairman of the Finance and Claims Committee; Ms. Barbara Smyth, Council President; Ms. Diana Carpio, Board of Education Chair; Harry Rilling; Mayor, Mr. Jared Schmitt, Chief Financial Officer of the City; Lunda Asmani; Chief Financial Officer of Norwalk Public Schools; Ms. Sheri McCready-Pritchett, Vice Chair of the Board of Education and Finance Chair; and Dr.. Alexandra Estrella, Superintendent of Norwalk Public Schools.

III. REMARKS BY MAYOR AND SUPERINTENDENT PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Mr. Rilling opened the remarks by acknowledging Mr. Greg Burnett, a long-time councilperson and former chairperson of the Finance & Claims Committee, for his pivotal role in establishing the joint public hearing process several years ago.

Mr. Rilling noted that this process allows the public to provide input before the budget process intensifies, expressing hope that it would soon be formalized in the City Charter. He addressed the challenges anticipated for the FYE 2027 budget, citing uncertainties surrounding federal funding pass-throughs and the loss of some capital funding.

Mr. Rilling discussed the ongoing second round of a four-year tax rebalancing phase-in, triggered by population growth, rising home prices, and increased commercial vacancy rates, which has shifted a greater tax burden onto residential properties. He stressed the committee's commitment to maintaining expected city services, providing a world-class education, and

minimizing the tax impact on residents, describing this as one of the most challenging responsibilities of the elected body.

Dr. Estrella followed with gratitude for the ongoing collaboration between the city, parents, and dedicated staff, acknowledging room for deeper relationships. She highlighted recent student successes, including meaningful academic growth, rising graduation rates, and a measurable decrease in chronic absenteeism, attributing these to strong relationships, high-quality instruction, and an inclusive school culture.

Dr. Estrella reaffirmed the district's priority to protect existing programs and services, committing to transparency and engagement through a planned survey in October and a town hall in November to gather community input for budget decisions.

IV. PRESENTATIONS

A. CFO of the City and CFO of the Norwalk Public Schools

City CFO Presentation

Mr. Schmitt began his presentation following the Mayor's remarks, delivering a PowerPoint overview. He noted an encouraging increase in attendance compared to the previous year, expressing hope for continued growth in public engagement. The presentation aimed to provide a budget overview and invite public input.

FY25 Overview (Preliminary): Mr. Schmitt emphasized that all FY25 financial figures are preliminary, as the books remain open and subject to change over the next month. He highlighted a recent \$53 million general obligation bond sale, netting over \$50 million after a \$2.5 million premium, with 15 bids from investment banks. The sale achieved a AAA rating from rating agencies and a competitive 3.69% yield, though Moody's expressed minor concern about the fund balance, maintaining a stable outlook.

FY25 Financial Performance: The fiscal year ended with a \$3.5 million deficit, largely due to revenue timing issues. A tax sale for delinquent taxpayers brought revenue earlier in FY24, despite being budgeted for FY25. Additionally, a \$3.3 million property sale, delayed to FY26 due to legal and agreement complexities, contributed to the deficit. Positive spending variances and a \$3.5 million post-budget contribution to the Board of Education, with \$1.5 million rolling into FY26, offset some challenges.

Contract Negotiations: Mr. Schmitt discussed a year-long negotiation of five contracts, leading to a new strategy of staggering terms—five years for police and fire, four years for others—to avoid simultaneous renewals. Annual increases range from 2.5% to 3%, guided by data from the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities. Changes included raising the city's 401 program contribution from 5% to 6%, creating pension parity for newer police and fire employees (offset by union member contributions), and adding \$2.5 million in contract steps.

Budget Process Timeline: Mr. Schmitt outlined a flexible timeline, with internal work through December, a mid-January public hearing, and the Mayor's budget proposal in early February, followed by mid-February hearings. The Common Council sets a spending cap, and the Board of Estimate and Taxation (BET) reviews in March, voting in April. The final budget and tax levy must be set on the first Monday of May. The capital budget follows a similar internal process,

becoming public in mid-January, with Planning and Zoning reviewing by January 30, and the Common Council approving in April.

Efficiency Highlights: Initiatives include online permitting (company selection imminent), updated purchasing guidelines, tax collection improvements (e.g., identifying unregistered vehicles), aggressive blight property action, and a July 2026 tax sale. The city is completing a fiber optic loop for network reliability by year-end and enhancing cybersecurity with monthly training and audits. Fire marshals consolidated three part-time roles into one full-time position, and collaboration with the Board of Education includes shared legal, IT, and facility support, plus a new e-budget book and time/attendance system.

FY27 Outlook: Mr. Schmitt identified challenges like inflation (especially for infrastructure), the third year of a four-year property revaluation (aiming to minimize homeowner impact), and uncertain employee healthcare costs. Positive developments include \$10 million in annual municipal aid from the state, though usage is constrained, and peaking investment income expected to decline as rates drop. The city aims to minimize an \$8 million fund balance drawdown through spending control and revenue generation.

Mr. Schmitt concluded by thanking attendees and passing the floor, with the meeting transitioning to the Superintendent's presentation.

Norwalk Public Schools CFO Presentation

Mr. Asmani began his presentation following Mr. Schmitt's remarks, starting after a slide transition prompted by the Mayor. His presentation focused on student enrollment, staffing, budget processes, key achievements, and FY27 considerations.

Student Enrollment and Staffing: Mr. Asmani reported a student enrollment of just over 11,600 as of June 1, 2025, with over 2,000 employees. The district welcomed over 1,200 new K-12 students and supports 51 languages, emphasizing its diverse community. Staffing distribution, effective July 1, 2025, showed the majority in elementary schools (due to their higher number), followed by middle and high schools, with support from facilities, transportation, and IT. The district operates a one-to-one program, providing devices to all 11,600 students and 3,000 staff, with IT focusing on device and audiovisual support. Grant-funded positions, limited by specific grant purposes, also prioritize student-facing roles.

Budget Cycle: Mr. Asmani outlined a budget cycle similar to the city's, beginning with staffing roster reviews with principals to match staff to student needs, particularly in special education where staff follow service demands. Budget requests from school departments start in November, with the Superintendent's recommendation and Board of Education approval by December/January, integrating into the city's process. From February to April, a student-based budget is developed, adjusting for enrollment data, high school elective scheduling, and contract-mandated class sizes, finalized by April with appropriated funds. Public input opportunities align with city hearings, supplemented by internal town halls and a planned November parent survey.

Achievements: Mr. Asmani highlighted a 92.6% graduation rate, the highest among Connecticut city schools and above the state average, reflecting intentional efforts. Academic performance ranked Norwalk first among city schools in English language arts, math, and science for 2025, with growth targets (PTA) surpassing state levels, notably for non-English speakers. Chronic

absenteeism, linked to a 70% high-need student population (vs. the state's 50%), has decreased, nearing state parity through family outreach and engaging instruction. Infrastructure milestones include the South Norwalk School (60% state reimbursement) and the Norwalk/P-TEC campus (80% reimbursement), supported by city and state collaboration.

Budget and FY27 Outlook: Mr. Asmani reported the FY25 budget closed at \$233 million, with the state allowing up to 2% carryover. Federal funds previously supported obligations, but reserves are now depleted, with FY25 savings addressing a \$1.4 million special education overrun. The initial FY26 budget of \$242 million was adjusted to \$247 million with a \$4.5 million city appropriation (\$1.5 million from prior funds). For FY27, the district plans to maintain these positions, monitor rising special education costs, resume funding BOE liability/auto/property insurance, honor collective bargaining agreements (e.g., a new teachers' union deal effective July 1, 2026), and explore school meal program funding after phasing out \$1.2 million from the CEP program.

Mr. Asmani concluded by thanking the audience and yielding to the public comment period, which began with a request for three-minute comments and encouraged written follow-ups to the Board of Education, Common Council, and BET.

B. City - Presentation to provide update of FYE 2025 and FYE 2026 Operating and Capital Budgets, and overview of FYE 2027 Budget Process

As noted in the above presentations for CFO of the City & CFO of Norwalk Public Schools.

C. Board of Education / NPS - Key Issues Impacting FYE 2026 Operating and Capital Budgets, and overview of FYE 2027 Budget Process

As noted in the above presentations for CFO of the City & CFO of Norwalk Public Schools.

V. PUBLIC HEARING ON THE FYE 2027 OPERATING BUDGET

John Levin, 249 Chestnut Hill Road, Norwalk

John Levin began by acknowledging the focus of the hearing on the municipal budget, but emphasized the urgency for Norwalk's elected leaders to look beyond traditional property taxes and consider the need for alternative revenue sources. He highlighted that Norwalk relies on property taxes for 88% of its budget, with three-quarters of that burden placed on residential owners. Despite Norwalk's role as a retail hub attracting shoppers from neighboring towns, the city sees none of the associated sales tax—all of it goes to the state government. John provided examples from states like North Carolina, Texas, and Alabama, where local sales taxes directly benefit city or county budgets, and suggested Norwalk push state lawmakers to let cities levy their own sales tax. He closed with praise for the recent hiring of an arborist and called for continued investment in Norwalk's green spaces, specifically recommending retention of Sarah Cruz as the city's arborist.

Neisha Oliver, 30 Vollmer Avenue, Norwalk

Neisha Oliver spoke about her role supporting food security and composting education initiatives in Norwalk schools and the broader community. Over the past seven months, she said, Jodi Trendler, the city's Director of Sustainability and Resilience, has set up programs saving residents and businesses money, expanded composting for schools to meet legislative requirements, and guided city-wide sustainability planning. Neisha highlighted the tangible

impact of Jodi's work, especially in improving quality of life and positioning Norwalk as a leader in sustainability. She urged the city to transition the Director of Sustainability and Resilience into a permanently funded position and described this as a smart investment for saving money, attracting new outside funding, and building a resilient future for Norwalk families.

Nick Zerzan, 1 Gene Avenue, Norwalk

Nick Zerzan stated that he was advocating for fully funding the Norwalk schools and Board of Education budget. He shared his immense gratitude for public schools in the city, crediting them for the progress his children have made, and referenced previous meetings about collaboration and continuity in leadership. He raised concerns about abrupt job cuts and described last year's confusion and turmoil in the budget process, hoping not to see a repeat. Nick appreciated the attention paid to issues like school lunches and expressed his trust and admiration for various school staff, including teachers, cafeteria workers, and security. He finished with a call for transparency and continuity in school budgets, hoping to see the best outcomes secured for Norwalk students and families.

Dr. Lynn Moore, 813 Foxborough Drive, Norwalk

Dr. Lynn Moore introduced themselves as president of the Board of Education Coalition of Unions and represented the organization, listing Mary Ordon, Steve Browning, Ryan Morris, and Hope Wyatt. They requested that the district avoid assigning arbitrary dollar amounts to school administrators when making budget cuts, and urged leaders not to erode arts programs, which have widespread parent support. Dr. Moore advocated for making reductions in unaffiliated ranks, citing top-heaviness in administration, and noted that the Coalition prepared a list of positions for elimination in June 2025. They asked that teachers be honored as the ones who boosted test scores and called for BOE officials to refuse votes that eliminate teachers or approve the budget carte blanche. Len Moore emphasized the need for Norwalk to compare its student outcomes to neighboring districts, and shared concerns about only 50% proficiency in English and 25% in math for Norwalk High's juniors on recent SAT results. They argued for improving student outcomes within budget limits, reflecting on Norwalk's 400-student decrease, and closed by thanking the community, parents, officials, and state delegation for ongoing support of students.

Drew Todd, 19 Friendly Road, Norwalk

Drew Todd introduced himself as co-chair of the SGC at Norwalk High, praising Dr. Moore's leadership and progress at the school. He expressed hopes that this would be his last year commenting on the school budget, as his son is graduating. Drew reiterated his demand for budgetary transparency, asking the council and Board of Education to go through the budget line by line in public, to avoid surprises and rumors. He emphasized the importance of clear communication and collaboration, especially with new board members and city administration. Drew supported creative strategies for raising city revenue, such as improving athletic facilities to attract tournaments and expressed strong support for preserving teaching positions and ending budgetary "games."

Daisy Sebastian (Zoom, address not provided)

Daisy Sebastian thanked the panel for the opportunity to speak and encouraged all budget decision-makers to consider the city's celebrated programs, such as dual language and music education. She shared concerns over cuts to these programs, especially the reduced Spanish

instruction in fourth, fifth, and sixth grades. Daisy lamented that some changes appeared to have been made “behind parents’ backs,” with little discussion. She commended the meeting’s transparency but recalled previous communication issues within the district. Daisy concluded by urging decision-makers to maintain high standards for student achievement and retain programs that deliver proven success, advocating for equity and quality in education for all children.

Charlotte Boutarel, Anderson Road, Norwalk (Zoom)

Charlotte Boutarel introduced herself as a recent Norwalk resident and the parent of a kindergartener at Cranberry Elementary School. She explained that her family moved to Norwalk because of the city’s strong emphasis on arts education and extracurriculars, a value she said was pivotal for her own development growing up. Charlotte emphasized how arts education cultivates creativity, confidence, and critical thinking, and urged the city to preserve and prioritize funding for the arts. She specifically praised Assistant Principal Chris Olson for his strong leadership, describing his presence as having a direct, positive impact on her child and every family at Cranberry. Charlotte expressed concern that losing such vital roles would harm the supportive environment that drew her family to Norwalk and thanked city leaders for their dedication and thoughtfulness in shaping the community for its children.

Tyler Fairbairn (address not provided) (Zoom)

Tyler Fairbairn thanked everyone for the opportunity to speak on the budget process and made a direct request related to transparency. He explained that, although he didn’t have specific academic or budgetary recommendations this early in the process, he was seeking clarity about the list of central office positions in the school budget. He shared frustration that the budget book and Board of Ed documents provided only vague categories, with little detail about what positions were being funded or cut. Tyler noted that specifics, such as positions like Assistant Education Administrator for Humanities, had appeared only once on a slide at a school governance council meeting. He argued that this kind of information should be available to parents in the budget book and highlighted the difficulty parents experienced advocating when they didn’t know what exactly was being affected. He concluded by asking that detailed information about school staffing and central office positions be made clear early in the budget process so families and the broader community could make informed decisions and advocacy efforts.

Sarah Alexander, 24 Friendly Road, Norwalk

Sarah Alexander, a parent and proud member of the Wolfpit Elementary School community, recounted her experiences during last year’s tumultuous budget process. She detailed reaching out in earnest to city officials—including council members—seeking answers about potential school cuts, only to receive no replies or follow-through. Sarah spoke about general disappointment in local government but acknowledged improvements in communication at this year’s hearing and called for all parties—council, Board of Ed, and the mayor—to work together with honesty and transparency. She encouraged leaders to abandon infighting and focus on shared goals for Norwalk’s students, noting that even modest improvements in openness could restore community trust. Sarah finished by emphasizing that the whole community wants to be involved and to help however possible, and she called on officials to set aside differences and provide clear explanations about budgets and decisions, so families won’t have to face similar turmoil again.

Christina Randall, 17 Hillside Place, Norwalk

Christina Randall indicated that she was speaking in her role as a member of Sustainable Streets, a local advocacy group focused on improving city walkability, safety, and accessibility. She praised the contributions of Jodi Trendler, the city’s Director of Sustainability and Resilience, for their coalition-building efforts and engagement with advocacy groups across Norwalk. Christina then highlighted the importance of planned street redesigns and described how federal grants intended for local safety upgrades were rescinded, jeopardizing projects like the MLK Drive overhaul. She offered personal testimony about the dangers of crossing MLK Drive on foot, explaining that even as an able-bodied adult, she felt unsafe attempting to cross five fast-moving lanes. Christina called on city leaders to find alternative funding for such street safety upgrades, explaining that the lack of safe passage divided and isolated neighborhoods, preventing families and residents from fully enjoying everything Norwalk has to offer.

Diane Lauricella, 21 Little Fox Lane, Norwalk

Diane Lauricella, an environmental professional and proud member of Sustainable Streets, expressed gratitude to council and staff for expanding opportunities for public comments, urging that such hearings become a regular feature. She advocated for both capital budget and operational reforms, focusing on regional partnerships with neighboring towns for shared purchases, waste management, and energy projects, believing this would achieve cost savings on projects and construction, and advocated a more holistic approach to Norwalk’s waste management, food waste reduction, and recycling. Diane emphasized that clean energy policy should be reviewed, including installing solar on more city buildings and moving toward net-zero energy schools, to further free up funds for classroom spending. She urged city leaders to heed the advice of other experts on environmental health and called for the city to avoid artificial turf projects, arguing that they are both expensive and hazardous to children’s health, and to continue investments in sustainable solutions for the community.

Paul Fox, 11 Hanford Place, Norwalk

Paul Fox explained that he regularly attends Bike Walk Commission meetings and has noticed that lack of capacity within the city’s Transportation, Mobility, and Parking department is hindering the commission’s efforts to improve biking and walking infrastructure. Paul requested that the city allocate additional funding to increase TMP’s capacity, specifically for biking, walking, and updating the city’s now-outdated Bike Walk Master Plan. He told the council that federal support for projects like street safety is diminishing, so local funding and planning will need to pick up the slack for the next several years. Paul also called for dedicated funding to improve bus and transit infrastructure, pointing out that bus stops in downtown Norwalk often lack even basic shelters, and the city should prioritize these needs moving forward.

Deanna Hansen, 10 Vollmer Avenue, Norwalk (Zoom)

Deanna Hansen began by expressing gratitude to everyone coming together for the budget discussion and made clear her expectation that Norwalk should put an emphasis on fully funding schools in the coming year. She referenced a recent \$4.5 million funding promise and thanked the city for ensuring those resources would reach the schools but warned that more is needed since federal and state funds are inadequate for the city’s diverse needs. Deanna stressed that schools form the foundation of the community, and savings should be found from non-essential line items before cutting anything school related. She emphasized the harm caused by uncertainty in retaining exceptional educators, requested that the superintendent find creative ways to work with available funds, and urged transparency from the Board of Ed so that union

members and teachers receive timely, clear communication. Deanna concluded by appealing for everyone at the hearing to work together to support the city's children, arguing a thriving district attracts and retains residents and taxpayers.

Dan Darbandi, 20 Ambler Drive, Norwalk (Zoom)

Dan Darbandi introduced himself as a member of Sustainable Streets and echoed the remarks of his prior colleagues regarding the importance of increased funding for biking, walking, and transit infrastructure. He said these upgrades are essential for the health and public safety of all residents, especially the students. Dan described the difficulties that come as Norwalk grows; while he prefers biking, walking, or public transit, he often has no choice but to drive. He recommended updating the Bike Walk Master Plan, ideally hiring dedicated city staff to oversee these improvements rather than only using outside consultants. Dan concluded by acknowledging Norwalk's many vibrant neighborhoods and expressed hope that these investments would help make the city more sustainable and livable for all.

Katie McFate, 6 Rampart Road, Norwalk (Zoom)

Katie McFate described her family's experience entering Norwalk Public Schools during the uncertainty of COVID, commending Dr. Estrella, the BOE, and school staff for building confidence and safety. Now out of the pandemic, she noted, families and students still face anxiety over job cuts, food insecurity, and broader social fears, with teachers worrying for their positions. Katie argued that Norwalk's diversity is its strength but is accompanied by unique challenges, and removing teachers only adds to the worries of families. She asked leaders to address food security, school safety, and transparent budgeting, pleading for collaboration above politics so children may have a safe, supportive learning environment.

Lisa Brinton, 19 Shorefront Park, Norwalk

Lisa Brinton thanked the panel and described her participation on the district's data management team alongside Dr. Moore, where they had tried to close achievement gaps. She observed that changing metrics in education makes it difficult now to simply track if students are at grade level in reading or math, and she cautioned that Norwalk is being compared to school systems in lower demographic reference groups than in the past, which concerns her. Lisa said the district is running a structural budget deficit, drawing down reserves and facing many unknowns, while local taxes provide the vast majority of school funding. She argued that Norwalk needs to find more revenue sources, such as enforcing blight fines, capturing parking revenue, and securing appropriate state education funds. Lisa pressed for aligning housing and education policy, warning against giving tax abatements to developers while underfunding schools, and stated that responsible, aligned funding is urgent for the city's future.

Angela Giraldo, 155 Perry Avenue

Angela Giraldo spoke as a concerned parent regarding the dual language program at Silvermine. She emphasized that the school's bilingual education program has benefited students for years but noted that recent reductions impacted Spanish instruction for fourth and fifth graders. Angela urged the council to restore fairness and equity, arguing that students should receive consistent levels of bilingual teaching across all grades. She explained that with adequate funding, the program could return to four sections per grade, maintaining the continuity and quality of bilingual learning, and she asked the city to make protecting Silvermine's dual language offerings a priority for all children moving forward.

Ana Tabachneck, 4 Gilbert Street, Norwalk

Ana Tabachneck called on the council to fully fund the Board of Ed budget, expressing frustration with the repeated pattern of underfunding, panic, and late financial solutions. She described previous meetings as “embarrassing” and called for direct communication and transparency, especially regarding the lack of space at Concord Magnet School. Ana highlighted that her daughter’s grade is a “bubble” with an extra class, which creates hardships, and she questioned why parents were not kept better informed about long-term plans for facilities and class size. She also urged the city to continue funding free school breakfasts and lunches, pointing out the community excitement and the benefit to all families, and closed by asking leaders to communicate openly about space, funding, and the future of CMS.

Lynn Daniels, address not provided (Zoom)

Lynn Daniels expressed concern about overall city priorities, urging the council to put the needs of the school district first. She agreed with earlier comments that Norwalk’s administration is top-heavy, referencing a news article that highlighted the large number of high-salaried administrators compared to teachers and paraeducators, who earn much less and make the most impact on students. Lynn argued for protecting and funding positions that serve children directly—such as paraeducators and music teachers—rather than preserving costly administrative roles. She emphasized how face-to-face staff shape the character and learning outcomes of children and concluded by advocating for school budgets that reflect these values and prioritize the classroom over administration.

Thomas Blyth, 94 East Ave, Apartment 2A, Norwalk

Thomas Blyth explained that he is a member of Sustainable Streets Norwalk and lives on East Avenue. He described how TMP (Transportation, Mobility, and Parking) is understaffed, and shared his experience walking from his apartment, stating that East Avenue is difficult and unpleasant for pedestrians, drivers, and bikers. He advocated for improvements such as a bike and pedestrian director and updating the bike-walk master plan. Thomas also mentioned the need for improvements in parking enforcement outside of downtown to return revenue to the city and suggested starting a tactical streetscape improvement program for quick, effective results. He urged funding for projects such as the Sono Rail Trail and Harbor Loop Trail and thanked the city for recent community engagement events.

Dallanara, Norwalk (address not provided) (Zoom)

Dallanara shared that she is a long-time Norwalk resident and a single mother of two children, a 15-year-old son attending P-TECH and a 7-year-old daughter at Wolfpit Elementary. She spoke to the need for school budgets to reflect real support for teachers, students, and families, emphasizing that every dollar counts and should be wisely invested. She expressed concern over students having to worry about paying for lunch, especially for single parents who might not get approved for extra resources. She mentioned the need for better sidewalks for students who walk to school and urged decision-makers to work together to invest in what benefits the school community the most.

Amanda Frazier, 23 Sachem Street, Norwalk (Zoom)

Amanda Frazier introduced herself as a PTA president and School Governance Council member at Kendall College and Career Academy. She echoed previous speakers’ concerns about the

chaos and dysfunction in the budget process, describing how students, parents, and teachers are working harder than ever even as uncertainty clouds their future. Amanda called for leadership, honesty, transparency, and trust, pointing out that these qualities need to be restored after recent setbacks. She stated that the community is eager for more consistency in schools, asking the district to learn from past years and urging leaders to truly hear parents and take steps toward transparency and stability for Norwalk's students and educators.

Mandy Singh, Norwalk 73 North Seir Hill Road Mandy Singh raised additional concerns regarding student support and budget clarity. She underscored the hardships families face with unclear budget documents and urged for a more accessible and transparent process so parents can better understand how funding is allocated and advocate for programs. Mandy advocated for more direct communication and the removal of unnecessary barriers to access, ultimately emphasizing that the current system leaves families in the dark about important decisions affecting their children's academic experiences.

Maria Myslinski, address not provided (Zoom)

Maria Myslinski expressed her appreciation for the district using ParentSquare to share meeting information, stating it helps families stay informed and involved. She raised a concern about Facebook comments that suggested parents might need to request to be added to certain mailing lists for updates, arguing that such information should be made universally and easily available. Maria also voiced disappointment with the transparency of the recent superintendent contract extension process, noting the agenda was not communicated openly and left many parents feeling sidelined. She called for genuine opportunities for parent input, consistent communication, and more open "town hall"-type forums where back-and-forth dialogue could take place. Maria concluded by urging the district to maintain a student-focused, transparent budget process that actively includes parents in decision-making.

Zina King, Nursery Court, Norwalk (Zoom)

Zina King requested that access to school budget documents be made more transparent and accessible for parents, instead of limiting budget visibility to administrators only. She explained that a lack of clear budget information had left parents unable to advocate for or protect programs—such as the dual language initiative—which she said was now "diluted" for fourth and fifth graders. Zina recounted that questions about the program and the overall budget had gone unanswered for years, despite requests for basic documents, and urged the district to share allocation decisions in a way that would prevent parents being left in the dark about the programs serving their children. She thanked the council for the opportunity to speak and emphasized the critical need for clarity and communication.

Elyse Williams, 24 Midrocks Drive, Norwalk

Elyse Williams stated she had planned only to observe the meeting but felt compelled to speak. She praised Norwalk teachers and staff, describing them as amazing and deeply committed to students. Elyse recounted her frustrations with the budgeting process, saying that previous years' experiences, the lack of consistent updates, and difficulty accessing line-by-line budget data had left parents and advocates feeling excluded from important decisions. She called on district leadership to learn from past mistakes and offer more transparency and honesty moving forward,

emphasizing the need for everyone to work together to create solutions and ensure that families are properly informed about and engaged in the process that affects their children's education.

Tanner Thompson, 16 Hillside Place #5K, Norwalk

Tanner Thompson introduced himself as a member of Sustainable Streets Norwalk and spoke about fiscal sustainability, environmental stewardship, and public health. He advocated decreasing Norwalk's dependence on cars and called for investments that support walkability, bikeability, public transit, and increased housing near transit corridors. Tanner outlined Sustainable Streets' recent policy asks, including the creation of a dedicated bike-pedestrian program manager position within the Transportation, Mobility, and Parking (TMP) department and more city-sponsored events that encourage active transportation. For the city's capital budget, he requested investments in updated bicycle and pedestrian master plans and additional resources for volunteer-driven street activation programs, crediting these efforts with drawing families and energizing neighborhoods.

Mary Dyes, 19 Oakfield Road, Norwalk (Zoom)

Mary Dyes highlighted the importance of people-oriented infrastructure. She noted the positive impact that new sidewalks have had on safety and access around schools, especially in areas like Brookside. However, Mary voiced concern about the pressures of population growth, especially apartment construction, on emergency response capacity such as fire department staffing. She supported ongoing investments in traditional and public safety infrastructure to ensure that as Norwalk grows, basic needs remain securely met for residents both old and new, including those at greater risk or with unique needs.

Sarah Rubito, address not provided (Zoom)

Sarah Rubito raised concerns about maintaining the positive momentum in budget transparency gained during this hearing. She referenced past inconsistencies and expressed hope that updated, easy-to-read budget documents—posted consistently online—would become standard practice. Sarah asked that real-time updates be available throughout the budget process so families tracking changes, especially those related to special education or class size, could stay informed. She also asked for a commitment from district leaders to make parent and stakeholder engagement an ongoing, two-way process and to avoid situations where critical decisions are finalized without meaningful community input.

Maria Zambrano (Zoom, address not provided) (Zoom)

Maria Zambrano was given the floor but did not unmute herself via Zoom to speak with the board.

Andrea Jacobs, parent of a West Rocks student (address not fully provided) (Zoom)

Andrea Jacobs spoke about her son's upcoming school trip and asked for assistance due to her financial situation and health challenges. She explained that she is currently undergoing chemotherapy for breast cancer and could not afford the \$400 trip fee. Andrea wanted to ensure her son would not miss out and asked whether any help was available, having already tried to raise some funds through a popcorn fundraiser. The council and staff acknowledged her request and discussed potential avenues for financial assistance.

VI. PUBLIC HEARING ON THE FYE 2027 CAPITAL BUDGET

This section was covered in the public hearing above.

VII. DISCUSSION

Mr. Rilling led the discussion, describing the public comments as insightful and constructive, noting their potential to guide future budget improvements. He suggested the need for clearer explanations of budget figures and proposed periodic meetings to address specific concerns, such as shortfalls and number changes, to enhance public understanding.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

**** MR. RILLING MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting was adjourned at 8:40 pm.

**Respectfully Submitted,
Courtney Baldwin
Recording Secretary**

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**PUBLIC PARTICIPATION
RELATING TO AGENDA ITEMS ONLY
3 MINUTES MAXIMUM PLEASE**

Special Meeting of the Joint (City & NPS) Finance Committee
FY 2026-2027 Operating and Capital Budgets

PLEASE PRINT

DATE: SEPTEMBER 24, 2025

| # | NAME | | ADDRESS |
|----|-------------------|----------------|-----------------------|
| 1 | TANNER THOMPSON | Zoom | 16 HILLSIDE PL #K5 |
| 2 | JOHN LEVIN | 7201 7204 | 249 Chestnut Hill Rd |
| 3 | Neisha Oliver | 704 706 | 30 Vollmer Ave |
| 4 | NICK ZERRA | 706 709 | 1 Jean Ave |
| 5 | Drew Todd | 714 716 | 19 Friendly |
| 6 | Dr. Lynn Moore | 709 713 | NHS Principal |
| 7 | SARAH ALEXANDER | 727 - 731 | 24 FRIENDLY ROAD |
| 8 | CHRISTINA RANDALL | 731 - 734 - | 17 HILLSIDE PL APT 2 |
| 9 | DIANE LAURICELLA | 734 - 738 | 21 Little Fox Lane |
| 10 | Jaimason Sutton | not present | 47 Cedar St. Apt 18 |
| 11 | Paul Fox | 739 741 | 11 Hanford Pl Floor 1 |
| 12 | Lisa Brinton | 748 752 | 19 Shafter Park |
| 13 | Angele Girardo | 752 755 | 155 Perry Ave |
| 14 | Ana Tabachneck | 755 758 | 4 Gilbert St. |
| 15 | Thomas Blyth | 758 802 | 94 East Ave #2A |

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RELATING TO AGENDA ITEMS ONLY
3 MINUTES MAXIMUM PLEASE**

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PLEASE PRINT

DATE: SEPTEMBER 24, 2025

| # | NAME | | ADDRESS |
|----|-----------------|---------------|---------------------|
| 1 | Sarah Rabito | 802- 804- | Neutron Ave |
| 2 | Mandy Singh | 8:10- 8:13 | 73 N. Seir Hill Rd. |
| 3 | Mary Dies | 8:19- 8:21 | 19 Oakfield Rd. |
| 4 | Tanner Thompson | 8:29 8:33 | 16 Hillside Pl #KS |
| 5 | Elyse Williams | 8:33 8:36 | 24 Midrocks Drive |
| 6 | Vanina Lesko | 8:36 8:38 | Neutron Rd |
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Public comment for 9/24 meeting

From Mallory Moyer <malloryhoward@gmail.com>

Date Mon 09/22/2025 11:59 AM

To Ellis, Tom <TEllis@norwalkct.gov>

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Dear Mayor Rilling, Ms. Smyth, Mr. Frayer, Dr. Estrella, Mr. Asmani, Ms. Carpio, Mr. Abrams, and Mr. Schmitt:

I'm a NPS parent and urge participants at the 9/24 meeting to commit to allocating more city funds toward the NPS budget. The exhausting yearly "budget crisis" can be avoided with proactivity and collaboration between the stakeholders.

There are many financial considerations in managing a city like Norwalk. We the taxpayers see beautiful new sidewalks and curbs. We see artwork and murals and multicolored parking garages. Most importantly of late, we see a fantastic new South Norwalk School - now it's time to make sure the beautiful building is staffed with competent, capable professionals. Buildings do not educate the children of Norwalk. Safe ways to walk to school do not mean a child will get the support, intellectual or emotional, they need to grow and thrive. Beyond the development of our children, our district cannot possibly hope to recruit and retain top talent if every single year there's fear and loud public outcry over cuts or a shortfall or a funding "crisis".

My understanding from following this cycle for several years is that the BOE makes the most of the dollars they are allocated by the BET. Parents get mad when the BOE makes tough decisions, but it's on you - the Mayor, the CFO, the Common Council, and especially the Board of Estimation and Taxation - to provide the total dollars. I urge Mr. Frayer, Mr. Schmitt and Mr. Abrams in particular to prioritize funding our schools above the current levels of the past few years. I additionally encourage Ms. Smyth, a mayoral candidate, to make clear her commitment to supporting Norwalk students and educators with an increased budget. Does this mean dollars for other areas should be cut? It does. I hope starting that conversation this fall allows thoughtful consideration of areas of the city where dollars can be trimmed to ensure a robust financial commitment to the students of our city.

Thank you for your time,

Mallory Moyer

22 New Canaan Court

Fw: Silvermine Changes

From Ellis, Tom <TEllis@norwalkct.gov>

Date Tue 09/23/2025 4:09 PM

To Ellis, Tom <TEllis@norwalkct.gov>

-----Original Message-----

From: Milena Arce <m19am@hotmail.com>

Sent: Monday, September 22, 2025 1:04 PM

To: Estrella, Alexandra <estrelaa@norwalkps.org>; Asmani, Lunda <AsmaniL@NorwalkPS.org>; carpiod@norwalkps.org; Rilling, Harry <hrilling@norwalkct.gov>; Frayer, James <councilmemberFrayer@norwalkct.gov>; Smyth, Barbara <councilmemberSmyth@norwalkct.gov>; Abrams, Ed <EAbrams@norwalkct.gov>; Schmitt, Jared <JSchmitt@norwalkct.gov>
Subject: Silvermine Changes

[Algunas personas que recibieron este mensaje no suelen recibir correo electr?nico de m19am@hotmail.com. Descubra por qu? esto es importante en <https://aka.ms/LearnAboutSenderIdentification>]

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Dear city and school district officials,

As a parent of a third grader, I am concerned about the changes that have been made over the past year to the dual language program at Silvermine school. Contrary to the dual program that had been established at Silvermine for years, fourth and fifth graders no longer have a team of one Spanish and one English teacher. Instead they now have two English teachers and one Spanish teacher, and are not receiving half the instructional minutes in Spanish and half the instructional minutes in English.

Please allocate the necessary funds, and do everything in your power to bring back the dual language program to all grades at Silvermine.

Thank you,
Milena Arce

FW: Silvermine needs your help! PLEASE

From Schmitt, Jared <JSchmitt@norwalkct.gov>

Date Tue 09/23/2025 5:06 PM

To Ellis, Tom <TEllis@norwalkct.gov>

Jared D. Schmitt
Chief Financial Officer

City of Norwalk
125 East Avenue
Norwalk, CT 06851
Office: 203.854.7870
Cell: 203.970.5034
Email: jschmitt@norwalkct.gov
Website: www.norwalkct.gov



From: Renata Em <rmendrok@gmail.com>

Sent: Tuesday, September 23, 2025 5:00 PM

To: Estrella, Alexandra <estrellaa@norwalkps.org>; Rilling, Harry <hrilling@norwalkct.gov>; Rilling, Harry <hrilling@norwalkct.gov>; board@norwalkps.org

Cc: Asmani, Lunda <AsmaniL@NorwalkPS.org>; carpiod@norwalkps.org; Frayer, James <councilmemberFrayer@norwalkct.gov>; Smyth, Barbara <councilmemberSmyth@norwalkct.gov>; Schmitt, Jared <JSchmitt@norwalkct.gov>; Abrams, Ed <EABramas@norwalkct.gov>

Subject: Silvermine needs your help! PLEASE

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Once again this year our school is facing some challenges. Silvermine Dual Language Program is very different from other Norwalk Public Schools, and yet it is being assessed the same way when it comes to budget and grading which does not seem appropriate. Our program is unique in the way that the children's day is split between English and Spanish, and in order to preserve this extraordinary curriculum, we need qualified and certified teachers. This will demand more funds to attract and retain bilingual educators, so they feel appreciated and rewarded for their hard work. As the original bilingual program in the area, our students deserve the best instructors and resources and the only way to obtain this is by offering competitive salaries and stopping the

turnover. Before similar programs are started in other public schools, the parents and students want to see Silvermine excel at what it was designed to do: focusing on bilingual learning, academic achievement and sociocultural competence.

I respectfully ask you to do something to help our Swans and this amazing school. We want to see the 50/50 learning brought back and continue in all grades as long as there is 15 students per classroom. We also ask for better communication from the administration about changes to the program in the future.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please feel free to contact me at the below email or phone number in case you need anything.

Renata K. Mendrok (parent of a Silvermine student)
rmendrok@gmail.com

203.570.0192

FW: Support for Silvermine Dual Language Program

From Schmitt, Jared <JSchmitt@norwalkct.gov>

Date Tue 09/23/2025 10:42 PM

To Ellis, Tom <TEllis@norwalkct.gov>

Jared D. Schmitt
Chief Financial Officer

City of Norwalk
125 East Avenue
Norwalk, CT 06851
Office: 203.854.7870
Cell: 203.970.5034
Email: jschmitt@norwalkct.gov
Website: www.norwalkct.gov



From: Hector Pachas <hmpachas@gmail.com>

Sent: Tuesday, September 23, 2025 8:47 PM

To: Estrella, Alexandra <estrellaa@norwalkps.org>; Asmani, Lunda <AsmaniL@NorwalkPS.org>; carpiod@norwalkps.org; Rilling, Harry <hrilling@norwalkct.gov>; Frayer, James <councilmemberFrayer@norwalkct.gov>; Smyth, Barbara <councilmemberSmyth@norwalkct.gov>; Abrams, Ed <EAbrams@norwalkct.gov>; Schmitt, Jared <JSchmitt@norwalkct.gov>

Subject: Support for Silvermine Dual Language Program

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Dear Dr. Estrella and Members of the Board,

I am writing as a concerned parent of a 5th grader at Silvermine Elementary and an incoming Kindergartener for next year,

I am writing today not only as a parent of a child attending Silvermine Elementary, but also as a community member deeply concerned about the future of our Dual Language program. As you know, Silvermine has a long history of offering high-quality bilingual education — with dedicated teams of English and Spanish teachers working together to ensure that every child receives equal instruction in both languages. This program has been a source of pride for our community and a proven path for student success.

The current proposal to reduce dual language opportunities for our 4th and 5th grade students is troubling for several reasons:

- **Equity and Access:** For years, Silvermine has provided students with an equal balance of Spanish and English instruction. Reducing or restructuring the program for upper grades limits access to the same quality of bilingual education that has been foundational to their earlier years of learning.
- **Classroom Needs:** For this model to work, it is essential to maintain four classes per grade, with a reasonable minimum of 15 students per classroom. Without this, the integrity of the dual language approach is lost, and children will not benefit from the consistency needed to grow their bilingual and biliterate skills.
- **Retention and Recruitment of Teachers:** Dual language programs require teachers with additional certifications such as TESOL. By offering stipends to support this certification, and by ensuring retention agreements for teachers who receive the benefit, Silvermine can attract and keep the qualified educators necessary for a thriving program.
- **Prioritizing Enrollment:** To preserve this program, it is also important that Silvermine's dual language classrooms are filled first, before slots in other Spanish programs across the district are assigned. This ensures that our established magnet school program continues to serve its intended purpose.

Our community has already shown that when parents raise their voices, positive change happens — as we saw recently when funding for music programs was restored. We now ask you to show the same commitment to bilingual education at Silvermine.

Our children deserve the chance to continue learning in both English and Spanish throughout their elementary years. This is not only about language; it is about equity, opportunity, and preparing students to thrive in a multilingual world.

I appreciate your time and consideration, and I, along with other families at Silvermine, urge you to protect and strengthen the dual language program by ensuring sufficient funding, reasonable class sizes, and support for the teachers who make this program possible. The support and work you do for your children across the district, as I've mentioned before, never goes unnoticed and is these type of situation where your dedication shines.

Respectfully,
Hector Pachas
60 George Ave
Norwalk, CT 06851

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[]

Re: Silvermine Dual School

From Ellis, Tom <TEllis@norwalkct.gov>

Date Wed 09/24/2025 1:17 PM

To Ellis, Tom <TEllis@norwalkct.gov>

From: Nubia Melendez <nubymelendez32@gmail.com>

Sent: Wednesday, September 24, 2025 12:24 PM

To: Schmitt, Jared <JSchmitt@norwalkct.gov>

Subject: Silvermine Dual School

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Estimados funcionarios de la ciudad y del distrito escolar:

Me preocupan los cambios que se han realizado durante el último año al programa de lenguaje dual de la escuela Silvermine. A diferencia del programa dual que se había establecido en Silvermine durante años, los alumnos de cuarto y quinto grado ya no cuentan con un equipo de un maestro de español y uno de inglés. En su lugar, ahora cuentan con dos maestros de inglés y uno de español, y no reciben la mitad de los minutos de instrucción en español y la otra mitad de los minutos de instrucción en inglés. Por favor asignen los fondos necesarios, y hagan todo lo posible para restablecer el programa de lenguaje dual en todos los grados en Silvermine.

Gracias.

Mamá de una alumna de Silvermine Dual School

Nubia Melendez

Google translate used:

Dear City and School District Officials:

I am concerned about the changes that have been made to Silvermine School's dual language program over the past year. Unlike the dual language program that had been in place at Silvermine for years, fourth and fifth grade students no longer have a team of one Spanish and one English teacher. Instead,

they now have two English and one Spanish teachers, and they no longer receive half of their instructional time in Spanish and half of their instructional time in English. Please allocate the necessary funds and do everything possible to restore the dual language program to all grade levels at Silvermine.

Thank you.

Mother of a Silvermine Dual Language

School student

FW: Silvermine Dual language

From Schmitt, Jared <JSchmitt@norwalkct.gov>

Date Wed 09/24/2025 12:58 PM

To Ellis, Tom <TEllis@norwalkct.gov>

Jared D. Schmitt
Chief Financial Officer

City of Norwalk
125 East Avenue
Norwalk, CT 06851
Office: 203.854.7870
Cell: 203.970.5034
Email: jschmitt@norwalkct.gov
Website: www.norwalkct.gov

-----Original Message-----

From: Christian Tejada <tejada1022@gmail.com>

Sent: Wednesday, September 24, 2025 12:58 PM

To: Estrella, Alexandra <estrellaa@norwalkps.org>; Asmani, Lunda <AsmaniL@NorwalkPS.org>; carpiod@norwalkps.org; Rilling, Harry <hrilling@norwalkct.gov>; Frayer, James <councilmemberFrayer@norwalkct.gov>; Smyth, Barbara <councilmemberSmyth@norwalkct.gov>; Abrams, Ed <EAbrams@norwalkct.gov>; Schmitt, Jared <JSchmitt@norwalkct.gov>

Subject: Silvermine Dual language

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Dear city and school district officials, I am concerned about the changes that have been made over the past year to the dual language program at Silvermine school. Contrary to the dual program that had been established at Silvermine for years, fourth and fifth graders no longer have a team of one Spanish and one English teacher. Instead, they now have two English teachers and one Spanish teacher, and are not receiving half the instructional minutes in Spanish and half the instructional minutes in English. Please allocate the necessary funds, and do everything in your power to bring back the dual language program to all grades at Silvermine.

Thank you
Christian Peña.

FW: Silvermine Dual Language

From Schmitt, Jared <JSchmitt@norwalkct.gov>

Date Wed 09/24/2025 2:03 PM

To Ellis, Tom <TEllis@norwalkct.gov>

Jared D. Schmitt
Chief Financial Officer

City of Norwalk
125 East Avenue
Norwalk, CT 06851
Office: 203.854.7870
Cell: 203.970.5034
Email: jschmitt@norwalkct.gov
Website: www.norwalkct.gov



From: ssmith910@gmail.com <ssmith910@gmail.com>

Sent: Wednesday, September 24, 2025 1:54 PM

To: Estrella, Alexandra <estrellaa@norwalkps.org>; Asmani, Lunda <AsmaniL@NorwalkPS.org>; carpiod@norwalkps.org; Rilling, Harry <hrilling@norwalkct.gov>; Frayer, James <councilmemberFrayer@norwalkct.gov>; Smyth, Barbara <councilmemberSmyth@norwalkct.gov>; Abrams, Ed <EAbams@norwalkct.gov>; Schmitt, Jared <JSchmitt@norwalkct.gov>

Subject: Silvermine Dual Language

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Hello,

I am a concerned Silvermine parent, writing to you about the changes that have been made over the past year to the dual language program at Silvermine school.

Contrary to the dual language program that has been established at Silvermine for years, fourth and fifth graders no longer have a team of one Spanish and one English teacher. Instead, they now have two English teachers and one Spanish teacher, and are not receiving half the instructional minutes in Spanish. Please allocate the necessary funds, and do everything in your power to bring back the dual language program to all grades at Silvermine.

It is a disservice to the children of Norwalk to spread funds and efforts across multiple schools vs. strengthening and solidifying the existing dual-language program at Silvermine. As a family who is districted to Marvin and who must bring our kids to Silvermine each day, I know the sacrifice it takes to get my kids across town before work and it is worth it because Silvermine has a strong program. Please do not continue to dilute the concept of the dual language program by trying to serve dual-language curriculum across multiple elementary schools in our district. You would not try to institute marine science or performing arts at other elementary schools, so why are you trying to position the dual-language curriculum at other elementary schools? It doesn't make sense.

As a parent of a kindergartener and 2nd grader, with 3 more future Silvermine Swans at home, I appreciate your attention to this matter and implore you to focus on dual-language curriculum through all six years of Silvermine.

Thank you,
Susan Lopez